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Prepares for Kosovo

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GRAFENWOHR TRAINING AREA – Safety and tank crew cohesion were the main goals as soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 35th Armored Regiment went through gunnery exercises at Grafenwoehr Training Area, Germany, during the final two weeks of July.

The soldiers completed their training in preparation for their upcoming mission in Kosovo by going through a variety of graded and timed combat simulation exercises as well as a live fire exercise.

“This is the capstone of the tankers’ training,” said 2nd Lt. Christopher D. Lheureux, platoon leader for 3rd Platoon, Company C. “We are out here to certify our crews and to prepare them for any eventuality that they might encounter when we go to Kosovo.”

According to Staff Sgt. Lamar Leitzke, a platoon

sergeant from Company C, many of the soldiers are new and in need of the training.

“The crews are mainly brand new with some experienced tankers mixed in,” said Leitzke. “They need to be brought up to speed and to standard. That is what these gunnery exercises are for. They help foster unit and crew cohesion.”

While a lot of the training was geared towards preparation for Kosovo, safety is always the highest priority.

“Safety was stressed from the first day throughout our time here,” said 2nd Lt. Craig C. Colucci, platoon leader from 2nd Platoon, Company C. “During the gunnery exercises we need to make sure that our skills are up to par. Attention to detail is very important in that we need to make sure all the crews do everything they would do in a real patrol situation.”

A platoon of soldiers conducted a live-fire counter attack exercise July 27. The exercise tested the platoon’s ability to engage moving and stationary targets during the day and with limited visibility during a tactical operation.

“This was a good exercise because it allowed the soldiers to utilize live fire, which is something that few units get the opportunity to do,” said Capt. Jerry J. Thomas, Company B commander, 1st Battalion, 35th Armored Regiment.

The two-day exercise covered approximately three kilometers and consisted of a day and night run. According to Thomas, one of the biggest challenges the platoon faced was the weather. Rain slowed down communications and fog did not allow them to engage night fire.

“Proficiency is very important in this exercise because it tests the platoon’s ability to go into combat,” said Thomas.

It was the last high-intensity conflict exercise conducted before the unit transitioned the training for their peace-support operation.

The peace-support operation training will focus on patrols, riot controls, searches and conducting reconnaissance. They will begin their mission in Kosovo in December.

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